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For Immediate Release
Dec. 13, 2006

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Senate passes key farmland preservation bill

LANSING—More farmland will be preserved in Michigan under legislation approved today in the state Senate, said Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, a key proponent of the bill.

Under House Bill 4257, owners of agricultural districts would be eligible to claim income tax credits for the farmland. The credits would equal the difference between all property taxes on the farmland and \$7 per acre.

“This is good legislation because it protects farmland from being developed by giving tax breaks to many family farms,” said Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores. “I have worked on this issue for the better part of four years and am glad to see it finally move to the governor for her signature.”

Under the measure, the owner of the agricultural district would enter into a contract with the Michigan Department of Agriculture. The contract would require that farmland designated as an agricultural district must remain in agricultural use for an initial term of 20 years. To apply for an agricultural district, farmers must live in counties that maintain and use a comprehensive land use plan.

The bill is similar to a proposal advocated in the governor’s land-use task force report. It is supported by several organizations, including the Michigan Association of Counties, the Michigan Townships Association and the Michigan Farm Bureau.

HB 4257 now returns to the House for concurrence.

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